PROGRAMME

OF THE

OXFORD CONFERENCE

on

Church, Community and State

July 12-26, 1937

UNIVERSAL CHRISTIAN COUNCIL FOR LIFE AND WORK
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The conference at Oxford will be distinguished from preceding conferences of a similar character by the greater thoroughness of the preparatory work, made possible by the existence of the Department of Research at Geneva. Through its efforts the help of several hundred thinkers in different countries has been enlisted during the three years preceding the conference in the intensive study of the subjects which will engage its attention. Some of the results of this preparatory work will be embodied in a series of volumes which will either be published before the conference or be available in proof-sheets at the time of its meeting. As a result of this preparatory work it may be hoped that the conference will be able to arrive with greater clearness than would otherwise have been possible at conclusions regarding the issues which are at the present time of supreme importance to the Church, the measure of existing agreement regarding them and the major divergences of view which have still to be reconciled.

Subjects

Prolonged consideration was given to the programme of the conference by the Universal Christian Council at its meeting at Chamby in August 1936. The Council resolved to recommend to the conference that the following should be the main subjects for discussion :

I. *The Church and the Community.*

This will include the consideration of the religious significance of those spheres of life which are not « Church » and

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in particular the relation of the Church to the common life as shaped by national tradition, expressing itself in characteristic folk ways and determined by current standards and values.

II. *The Church and the State.*

This will include consideration of the Christian view of the State, of the claims of the contemporary State, and of the Christian conception of freedom.

III. *Church, Community and State in Relation to the Social Order.*

IV. *Church, Community and State in Relation to Education.*

The relations of Church, Community and State are in many instances particularly acute and pressing in the sphere of education and this aspect of the general problem therefore calls for special and separate consideration.

V. *The Universal Church (« Una Sancta ») and a World of Nations.*

This will include the consideration of questions relating to nationalism, international relations, and the Church as a supra-national, œcumenical society.

Christianity and War.

It is left for later decision whether there should be one section of the conference which will consider the fifth subject as a whole and present a report dealing with both parts, or whether the difficulty of covering the whole of the ground in the time available makes it more desirable that the section should meet in two separate groups, one of which would deal with the first part of the subject and the other with the second, and each of which would present a separate report.

It is proposed that for the consideration of these subjects the conference should divide itself into five sections which will meet simultaneously in the evenings as may be required and present reports to the conference.

Method of work

In order to prepare as thoroughly as possible for the consideration of these subjects at the conference, the Universal Christian Council is nominating chairmen for each of the sections. The chairman of each section, with the help of a small group of advisers and such further help as the Research Department may be able to put at his disposal, will on the basis of the preparatory study during the past three years prepare a memorandum to submit to the section as a possible basis for discussion. The aim of the memorandum in each case will be to focus attention on those aspects of the subject which, in the light of the preparatory work, seem to be the most central, the most vital, the most appropriate for consideration by the conference, and the most urgently calling for action. It will attempt, further, to state clearly both the measure of Christian conviction which the preparatory work has shown to exist and also the major divergences of view which have manifested themselves. It may be expected that each section of the conference will at an early meeting appoint its own drafting committee, which would naturally include those who have contributed most actively in the way proposed to the preparation of the memoranda.

As an aid to the consideration of the main subjects which have been named above, it is proposed that two small committees should be appointed to submit to the conference statements dealing respectively with (*a*) the major differences of conviction which have emerged in the course of the preparatory work and which bear on the work of the conference, and (*b*) the question of the ways in which the Church functions, and ought to function, in the social and political sphere.

Programme

In regard to the actual programme it is proposed that :

(1) The first meeting should be on Monday afternoon July 12th for the reception of delegates and for formal business, and that the main business of the evening meeting should be the delivery of the opening address by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

(2) The first business on the morning of Tuesday the 13th should be the presentation of a review of developments from Stockholm to Oxford, to be followed by addresses describing the contemporary situation in different parts of the world.

(3) Wednesday, Thursday and Friday in the first week should be devoted to the presentation and discussion of the major issues brought to light in the preparatory work and to the preliminary opening up of the subjects to be considered by the Conference.

(4) Saturday July 17th should be kept free from meetings .

(5) The second week should be devoted to receiving and considering the reports from the sections on the five main subjects and to the consideration of proposals relating to the future of the œcumenical movement.

(6) There should be held daily in the University Church a devotional service in the morning lasting for half an hour and also a devotional service of a quarter of an hour after the afternoon session.

(7) There should on each of the two Sundays be a service of common worship in the morning in the University Church, and in the afternoon or evening of the first Sunday a service of intercession and on the evening of the second Sunday a closing service of thanksgiving and dedication.

In regard to the translation of speeches, translations in English, French and German will be made of the main addresses in advance and be available for members of the conference in typescript. When this is done, there will be no spoken translation. In other cases brief summaries of each speech will be given in translation by members of a corps of interpreters attached to each section of the conference.

Principles

The Universal Christian Council approved of the following statement of principles relating to the character and procedure of the Oxford Conference :

(*a*) It may be hoped that an œcumenical gathering, meeting in the existing grave situation, may be enabled by the grace of God to offer some guidance and helpful counsel to the Churches in the perplexities of the present time. But the conference possesses no legislative authority, and, as was stated in the letter of invitation to the Churches, has no power to legislate on behalf of the Churches. Its pronouncements will have no binding force over the participating Churches beyond that which attaches to the truth that is

in them in accordance with the insight given by the Holy Spirit.

(*b*) The conference will not attempt to decide between divergent views on the subjects considered by the conference by the vote of a majority. Where differences are found among its members, these differences will be frankly recognised and respected. The aim of the conference will be to reflect faithfully the present state of Christian conviction as represented in its membership without any attempt to suppress or override views held by any group among its members.

(*c*) Inasmuch as the gravity of the present crisis calls for complete sincerity of thought and utterance, any statements which the conference may issue will aim at recording with equal faithfulness the measure of agreement and the measure of disagreement which are found to exist among its members in regard to the various subjects on which the conference expresses its mind. In so far as there is a common body of Christian conviction this will be clearly stated. In so far as there are found to be major divergences of view, these will not be glossed over or minimised but openly acknowledged in order that they may be made the starting point for further study and thought.

(*d*) The conference will be free to approve for submission to the Churches proposals in regard to the future of the œcumenical movement.

IMP. RÉUNIES, VALENCE — 24-11-36